

University rankings key tool in recruiting foreign students

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Canada's top schools to reap rewards

In the race to attract students from around the world, where you rank can make all the difference.

Students in Asia, Europe and elsewhere scour global university rankings when deciding where to spend their higher-education dollars - and once again, some of Canada's top schools will reap those rewards.

Nine Canadian universities, including the University of Toronto, University of British Columbia and McGill University, nabbed spots in this year's Times Higher Education's World University Rankings, a widely watched international ranking of 200 schools.

And while leaders at many Canadian universities have an uneasy relationship with rankings, arguing that they are an imperfect tool for measuring quality, they also know that rankings play a role in recruiting foreign students and faculty. Rankings also allow universities to develop international partnerships with other schools and corporations more easily.

"I'm so struck when I travel around internationally. These rankings are looked at by students and parents as part of their decision-making process," UBC president Stephen Toope said. "It's very positive for us to be seen in the top tier of universities internationally."

UBC, which moved up 10 spots from last year in the Times list, placing 30th overall, already has a more established global reputation, as does U of T, which placed 17th and McGill, which ranked 35th. But Mr. Toope said that global rankings help universities solidify their reputations in the eyes of future students.

"When you see consistently strong performance ... and a gentle rise in the rankings, it probably does have some impact internationally on perceptions of the university," he said. "The more a select group of Canadian universities is seen as globally relevant, I think that's good for the country."

Rankings tend to have a larger impact on smaller institutions that are looking to boost their international student body and increase their profile on the world stage. While most global rankings don't vary too much in their lists of the top 10 or even 20 schools, they provide future students with a sense of how close lesser-known schools are to likes of Harvard and Stanford.

"Students in China have heard of UBC, McGill and U of T. They've not heard of anybody else [in Canada]. But if you can say we're in the top 200 in the world, that would work," said Alex Usher, president of the Toronto-based consultancy firm Higher Education Strategy Associates. "I would think for UVic, that's an enormous bonus for international recruitment, if that's a road they want to go down."

The University of Victoria was promoted in the Times ranking for the first time, nabbing the 130th spot. President David Turpin said international pupils make up roughly 10 per cent of the university's student body, "and that number will grow in the future."

"When a university is featured along with other leading universities in the world, that of course is a very positive thing. It signals the quality of the learning environment we've been working so hard to produce," Mr. Turpin said.